Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
FY 2009 Indian Environmental General Assistance Program (IGAP) Proposal
October 1, 2009 - September 30, 2010

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

I. INTRODUCTION

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) was formed in 1977 by the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. Under treaties with the United States signed in 1855, the CRITFC member tribes reserved their sovereign rights to hunt and fish in areas ceded to the U.S. and at all usual and accustomed fishing stations. The ancestral homeland of the CRITFC tribes covers one-fourth of the entire Columbia River Basin. CRITFC is governed by the fish and wildlife committees of the tribes and is a technical support and coordinating agency for the tribal fisheries. Salmon, water, and other resources are critical to tribal culture, religion, and economy.

CRITFC is a technical support and coordinating agency for the fisheries management policies of its member tribes. The fish and wildlife committees of these tribes govern CRITFC. CRITFC employs biologists, hydrologists, other scientists, public information specialists, policy analysts, and administrators who work in a variety of areas in support of the tribal salmon restoration efforts. These areas of expertise include fisheries harvest control and coordination, scientific support, watershed restoration, water quality, private fund raising, public outreach, advocacy, and planning. CRITFC also operates a fisheries enforcement program for the four tribes. Inter-tribal police officers protect treaty fishermen from harm and harassment and enforce tribal fishing regulations.

Tribal Plan: The four Columbia River treaty tribes have developed a plan, "*Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit* (Spirit of the Salmon): The Columbia River Anadromous Fish Plan of the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Yakama Tribes," which uses a basin-wide, ecosystem approach to halt the decline of Columbia River salmon and restore these once-abundant populations. *Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit* addresses the problems affecting each stage of the salmon's life cycle, providing recommendations in the areas of habitat (including water quality), hydropower operation, harvest, and hatchery management. The plan combines the best current science with traditional knowledge and wisdom about the Columbia River Basin and its salmon populations to create a comprehensive, coordinated approach to salmon recovery. *Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit* presents an approach for habitat restoration that addresses critical habitat needs. A key feature of this approach includes protecting Columbia River Basin watersheds and water quality from additional damage. Specifically, the plan seeks to improve water quality by: 1) eliminating sources of toxic pollution that accumulate in fish; and 2) reducing discharges of other contaminants to meet water quality criteria for anadromous fish.

The future of the tribal fishery depends on healthy watersheds. High quality water is critical to maintaining this watershed health. The importance of water quality to our member tribes cannot be overstated. As part of their tradition, water nourishes all life and as such, is treated with respect. Without this respect, the water cannot be protected from the myriad of human impacts that occur. Degraded water cannot nurture salmon or the humans who depend upon it for their physical and spiritual well being. Secured by trust and treaty, it is imperative that this precious resource meets the enduring needs of present and future generations.

CRITFC's EPA General Assistance Program (GAP) History: CRITFC has received General Assistance Program (GAP) funding since the late 1990s which has enabled CRITFC staff to promote tribal program development in support of tribal salmon restoration and conduct the following activities: 1) provide ongoing

coordination and technical support to tribal water quality programs of CRITFC's member tribes; 2) promote and facilitate outreach initiatives to advance *Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit* water quality goals; 3) advocate for stable funding sources and technical assistance for tribal water quality and watershed programs; and 4) assist the member tribes in the refinement of ongoing, basin-wide water quality programs within a watershed framework.

A. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Geographic Scope: The Columbia River Basin encompasses nearly 260,000 square miles. The river drains most of Washington and Idaho, half of Oregon, Montana west of the Continental Divide, small portions of Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada and 40,000 square miles of British Columbia. The 1,214-mile-long river begins at Columbia Lake, high in the Rocky Mountains of British Columbia, Canada. It initially flows northwest for 218 miles. After crossing the U.S.-Canada border into northeastern Washington, the Columbia River flows south, west, and south again across central Washington in a broad curve commonly referred to as the Big Bend. Just below the mouth of the Snake River, the Columbia runs west for its remaining 210 miles. It cuts through the heart of the Cascade Mountains, thus forming the Columbia River Gorge; flows into the Columbia River Estuary and finally empties into the Pacific Ocean at Astoria, Oregon. The Columbia River and its tributaries drain from high country watersheds through commercial forest lands, agriculture areas, dams and industrial cities.

Water Quality Degradation: The Columbia River Basin was identified as one of seven Large Aquatic Ecosystems in EPA's 2006-2011 Strategic Plan and . In January 2009, EPA released the *Columbia River State of the River Report for Toxics* which was a comprehensive look at contaminants in the basin. The report found continued threats to people, fish and wildlife exist from four widespread contaminants (mercury, DDT, PCBs, and PBDE), along with other toxics and emerging contaminants. Tribal members rely on the fishery at a higher level than the non-tribal community putting them at a greater risk of exposure to these toxic contaminants and other pollution sources.

Healthy populations of anadromous fish require cold, clean water in addition to well-connected habitat. These conditions are needed to fully support biological function throughout the salmonid life cycle. Large-scale consumptive uses in the basin however, have fragmented and destroyed much of the historical habitat resulting in degraded watersheds and water quality. The prevalence of toxic contaminants and other pollution present specific challenges to fisheries recovery and to other aquatic resource restoration efforts in the region due to the uncertainty associated with the lethal and sub-lethal impacts to fish survival and productivity.

Climate Change: The impacts of climate change on water quality are also a growing concern. Evidence for anthropogenic climate change is strong and a well-documented scientific consensus finds that the earth has warmed in the 20th century from human activities and will likely continue to do so at an increasing rate during the 21st century (Oreskes 2004, IPCC 2007). Climate change is expected to significantly alter the ecology and economy of the Pacific Northwest during the 21st century. Higher temperatures are expected to decrease snowfall and increase rainfall during the winter months, leading to shifts in the timing and quantity of runoff. This is likely to produce increased flooding during the winter and decreased flows during the summer when water supply demands are high. Water quality will also likely be impacted, including increased erosion and sediment delivery from winter storms and higher summer water temperatures.

Those impacts will significantly affect the CRITFC member tribes and their cultural use of resources. Salmon are particularly susceptible to changes in water quantity and quality because they rely on freshwater rivers and streams for migration, and for spawning and rearing habitat. Moreover, their survival is already imperiled by an accumulation of other factors.

Alternative energy sources (for example LNG, wind , solar, and wave) are being explored to diversify the west coast energy supply, however the location and transmission systems they may demand will also require careful

consideration regarding their impacts to the environment and water supply.

Tribal Subsistence Resources: CRITFC also provides operation and maintenance of nearly 30 treaty fishing access sites along the Columbia River from the Bonneville Dam to the McNary Dam. These sites support the tribal treaty fishers during the harvest of various species of fish for commercial, ceremonial and subsistence needs. Concern is emerging over the amount of debris and solid waste accumulating and being abandoned on the sites from a variety of sources. The waste is poised to impact both water quality and human health. Some of the sites are in remote locations yet there is heavy use and intense demands on these sites to support a tribal treaty fishery into perpetuity.

B. ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES

CRITFC's plan, *Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit (Spirit of the Salmon)*, remains the foundation for a basin-wide, ecosystem approach to restore the once-abundant anadromous fish populations. The implementation of the plan relies on CRITFC staff consisting of scientists, technicians, policy experts, communication professionals, conservation officers, and the administrative support staff to support CRITFC operations. Among the provisions, the plan seeks to improve water quality by: 1) eliminating sources of toxic pollution that accumulate in fish; and 2) reducing discharges of other contaminants to meet water quality criteria for anadromous fish.

CRITFC continues to partner with federal and local government agencies, environmental groups, industry, and other stakeholders on watershed health and water quality concerns. In 2008, CRITFC was part of a collaborative effort to reach three 10-year agreements in the region intended to rebuild salmon populations and ensure tribal treaty rights are protected (the Columbia Basin Fish Accords, Chinook Chapter of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and Fish Management Plan under *U.S. v. Oregon*).

CRITFC's earlier fish consumption and fish contamination studies were used in a cooperative effort between the Umatilla Tribe, EPA and Oregon to initiate an administrative process to increase the state's fish consumption rate as part of the methodology to determine water quality standards. The result is an explicit recognition of the tribal characteristics unique to Oregon's population in setting appropriate standards for the benefit of tribal communities as well as other segments of Oregon's population who are highly dependent on fish consumption in their diet.

This past year CRITFC assisted in planning and hosting a regional climate change conference for tribes. The conference brought together policy and technical perspectives to assist tribes in recognizing the infrastructure and capacity needed to address this emerging and overwhelming issue. CRITFC staff continues to make presentations and participate in forums addressing climate change.

Additional support included the preparation of technical comments on regulatory processes such as the Clean Water Act programs administered by the states that may impact the treaty trust resources of the CRITFC member tribes. Staff also participate in activities related to hazardous waste cleanup at the Portland Harbor Superfund site and Bradford Island as well as other forums such as the Lower Columbia River Toxics Reduction Strategy group and the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership that address toxic contaminants in the Columbia River Basin.

II. COMPONENTS

CRITFC will continue to key on the technical capacity to understand and solve complex, scientific issues to protect tribal members and the treaty secured resources from environmental harm. CRITFC and its member tribes present a unified approach to water quality restoration to coordinate tribal actions and provide outreach to non-tribal governments and other entities working on water quality restoration in the Columbia River Basin.

This GAP program has four principle components: 1) Provide ongoing technical and coordinating support to the tribal environmental programs on broad water quality issues including the Toxic Reduction Initiatives prescribed in the *Columbia River Basin State of the River Report*. 2) Promote and advance water quality improvements consistent with the fish consumption and fish contamination analysis to gain recognition of tribal patterns in establishing water quality standards. 3) Elevate efforts to develop knowledge, strategies and collaborative efforts in response to the complex issues and technical information on climate change and its potential effects. 4) Begin an evaluation and development of strategies for a self sustaining, long term prevention effort to deal with the solid waste accumulation and disposal issues on the tribal treaty fishing sites.

III. JOINT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROCESS

Within 30 days of the end of each fiscal quarter, the CRITFC will submit a performance report detailing the accomplishments, and identifying any existing problem areas that could affect or delay project completion. If the EPA Project Officer, after reviewing the report, finds that the recipient has not made sufficient progress under the work plan, EPA and CRITFC will negotiate a resolution that addresses the issues. This evaluation process will help to ensure that the grant is being administered properly and that work conducted under the grant is in accordance with the approved work plan.

IV. EPA ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The EPA will have no substantial involvement in the accomplishment of work plan commitments. EPA will monitor progress and provide technical assistance as needed to ensure project completion.